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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/11/2017
TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: SLAIN BELARUSIAN JOURNALIST'S SON FLEES TO MOSCOW

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel A. Russell.
Reason 1.4 (b and d).

1. (C) This is an action request. See paragraphs 6 and 7.

2. (C) Anton Filimonov, the 17-year-old son of slain Belarusian journalist Veronika Cherkasova, has fled to Moscow accompanied by Cherkasova's stepfather Vladimir Meleshko. Meleshko told REFCOORD that they believed Filimonov was in imminent danger in Minsk and left Belarussia on May 9. Meleshko said the family had reason to believe that Belarusian authorities planned kill to him by "provoking" a fistfight that would result in the boy being badly beaten, although he offered no further details on the source of that information. He said the family had been repeatedly threatened and was under constant surveillance by Belarusian authorities over the past several months.

3. (C) Meleshko told us he believes that authorities continue to harass the family because of the "explosive" information that Cherkasova was able to uncover before she was killed. Cherkasova was stabbed numerous times in her Minsk apartment on October 20, 2004. The editor of her paper Solidarnost has said he believed that she was killed because of her investigation into alleged arms sales by Belarus to Iraq. Meleshko said repeatedly that he believes Belarussian Government agents killed Cherkasova.

3. (C) Filimonov's father Dmitriy lives in Moscow and works as a journalist at the newspaper Izvestiya. Meleshko said he was afraid for the boy to stay with his father because the apartment may be under surveillance and Anton easily found there. Anton stayed with his father for two months in 2005 when he was sought by Belarusian authorities as a suspect in his mother's death. He returned to Minsk in April 2005 after authorities announced he was no longer a suspect, but he was later charged with and convicted of counterfeiting and given a two-and-half year suspended sentence. Dmitriy Filimonov, the father, did not accompany his son and Meleshko to the meeting with REFCOORD and it is not clear what his relationship with his son might be at this time.

4. (C) REFCOORD explained the possibility of resettlement to the U.S., but noted the complexities of this case in light of the younger Filimonov's age and the criminal conviction. REFCOORD accompanied Meleshko and Filimonov to UNHCR, which granted him an immediate interview for refugee status determination. UNHCR officials told us that they have scheduled a second interview for May 14.

COMMENT AND ACTION REQUESTS

5. (C) Meleshko and Filimonov are visibly worried and believe that the threat to Filimonov is serious enough that they initially sought protection for him within the Embassy.

Currently, however, we do not think that such protection is warranted in light of his previous stay in Moscow without incident. They are in need of shelter, however, and we are working with various human rights groups to find them temporary accommodations. We will continue to follow their situation closely.

16. (C) For the Department: Should UNHCR refer the case to us, we would accept it in keeping with Department policy; however, given Filimonov's status as a minor, the presence of his father in Moscow, and his previous conviction, we believe that this case could not be processed expeditiously. Should there be any actions we should take in the interim, we request Department guidance soonest.

17. (C) For Embassy Minsk: Post requests Embassy Minsk's assessment of Filimonov's current situation in Belarus and what threats he may be facing from Belarusian authorities.
BURNS